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# **THE POETRY AND PHILOSOPHY OF BROWNING**

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**A Handbook of Eight Lectures by  
Edward Howard Griggs**

*Price 30 cents, net*

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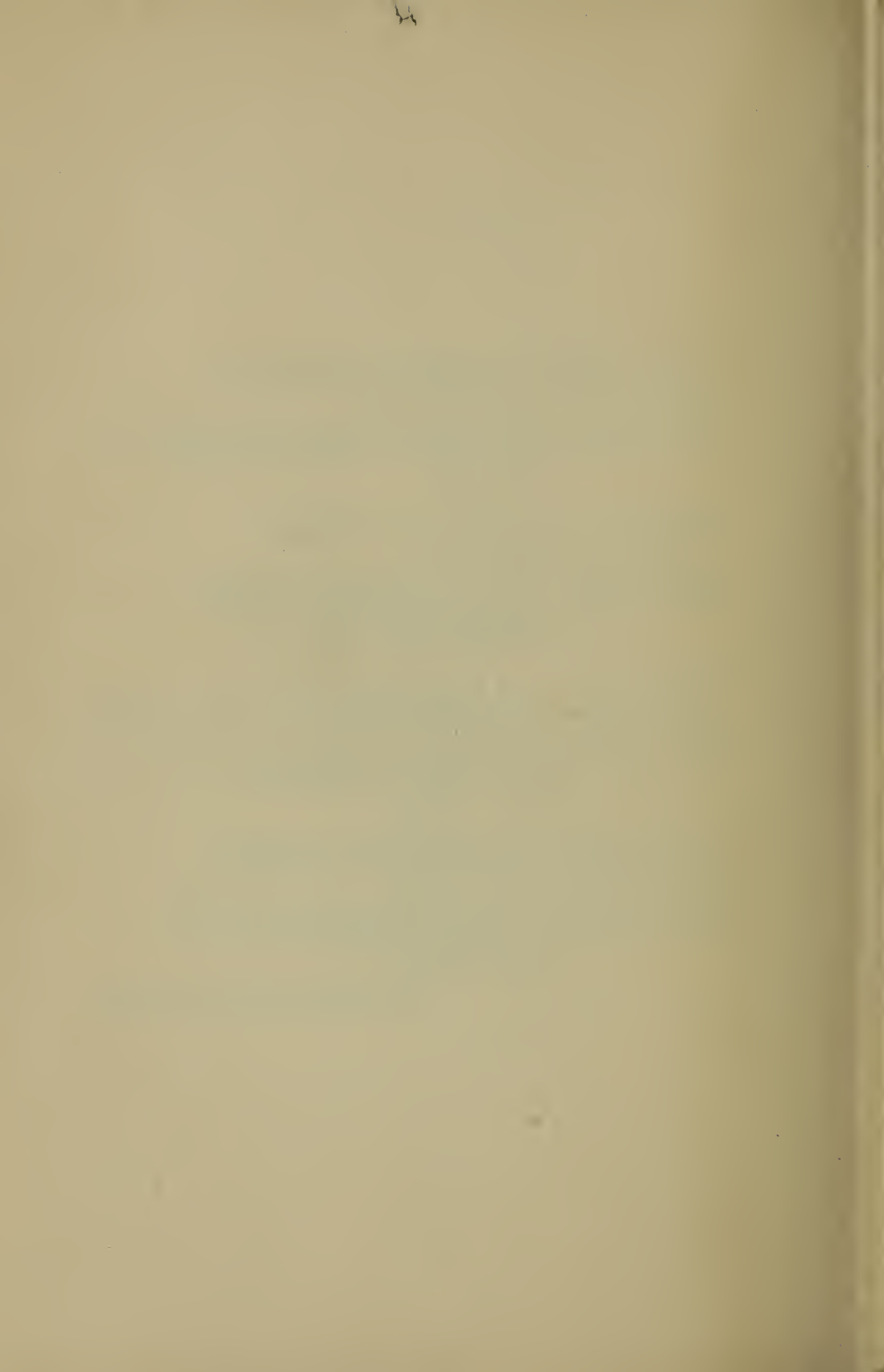
"At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,  
When you set your fancies free,  
Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, imprisoned—  
Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,  
—Pity me?

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!  
What had I on earth to do  
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?  
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel  
—Being—who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better  
Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time  
Greet the unseen with a cheer!  
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,  
'Strive and thrive!' cry 'Speed,—fight on, fare ever  
There as here!'"

—Browning, *Epilogue to Asolando*.



## INDEX.

	PAGE
Note: Spirit of the Course . . . . .	6
<hr style="width: 20%; margin: 10px auto;"/>	
1. The Positive Message: Rabbi Ben Ezra . . . . .	7
2. Music and the Spirit: Abt Vogler . . . . .	12
3. The Study of Personality: Andrea del Sarto . . . . .	17
4. The Portrayal of Failure: Cleon . . . . .	21
5. The Tragedy of the Pursuit of Knowledge: Paracelsus . . . . .	25
6. Browning's Philosophy of Art and Life: The Ring and the Book . . . . .	30
7. The Crowning Revelation of Manhood: Caponsacchi . . . . .	35
8. Browning's Interpretation of Womanhood: Pompilia . . . . .	40
<hr style="width: 20%; margin: 10px auto;"/>	
Suggestions to Students . . . . .	45
Book List . . . . .	46



## SPIRIT OF THE COURSE.

THE aim of this course is to give an introduction to the poetry and philosophy of Browning through the careful study of a few typical and especially lofty expressions of his genius. The first half of the course will deal with four of Browning's representative shorter poems, chosen as best expressing at once his interpretation of human life and his characteristic poetic method, the dramatic monologue. The second half of the course will deal with two of his longer works which illustrate in widely different ways his characteristics in thought and art. Of these, *Paracelsus* embodies the youthful Browning, plunging into the deepest psychological and moral problems, while *The Ring and the Book*, a dozen dramatic monologues interpreting one theme, gives Browning's mature philosophy of art and life and contains his highest presentation of exalted manhood and womanhood. An appreciation of these poems should give such an understanding of Browning's essential attitude and characteristic poetic form as to furnish a key to all else he has written.

Many of us can testify with deep gratitude to the unique influence of Browning over us. We love him peculiarly, not only as a poet, but because he has helped waken us to the deepest ends and meaning of human life. To our age he is a great spiritual teacher, not of the conventions of faith, but of that religion of personal life which the world is beginning faintly to understand.

Prophet as he is with reference to modern life, expressing, not the conceptions that come and go with the hour, but those great ideas which come through the long unfolding of humanity, Browning is not easily understood until we saturate ourselves with a few great embodiments of his genius, and thus learn to read his poetry from the point of view of his own spirit. When we are able to do this, Browning is rarely more difficult to read than the range and depth of problems he attempts, necessitates. Instead of finding him obscure, we respond with increasing exhilaration to the rapid movement and deep suggestion of his thought, and to the strength, variety and harmonious adaptation of his virile and often exquisite poetic form.



## I. THE POSITIVE MESSAGE: RABBI BEN EZRA.

"Only a learner,  
Quick one or slow one,  
Just a discerner,  
I would teach no one.  
I am earth's native:  
No rearranging it!  
I be creative,  
Chopping and changing it?"

—Browning, *Pisgah-Sights II*, p. 205.\*

"Then life is—to wake not sleep,  
Rise and not rest, but press  
From earth's level where blindly creep  
Things perfected, more or less,  
To the heaven's height, far and steep."

—Browning, *Asolando, Reverie*, p. 266.

## LECTURE OUTLINE.

**Introduction.**—The statement regarding Thoreau that it was his misfortune to have had a brilliant enemy as a critic and a weak friend as apologist. Application of this to the multitude of critics and apologists in the case of Browning. His misfortune that the subjective and spiritual character of his poetry made it fall easily a prey to those who cultivate the mysticism of intellectual laziness, dabbling in the esoteric because unwilling to take the trouble to think clearly, imagining that obscure expression is depth of thought. Yet already the froth of misguided adoration and prejudiced attack clearing away, and a recognition growing that Browning is distinctly the most virile and spiritually awakening mind in modern English literature.

**Browning's alleged obscurity.**—Reasons for the charge: (1) Intropective interest of Browning; (2) Characteristic method; (3) Rapid movement of thought; (4) Depth of thought and problem; (5) Absence of explanation, and assumption of special knowledge. Thus necessary

\* All references to Browning are to the Camberwell edition. See the Book List, p. 46.

to bring to the poem some knowledge of the subject it presents; to get into sympathy with the spirit and movement of Browning's thought; to grapple with the deep problems he studies. The question whether there is still an element of unnecessary obscurity.

**Method of the course.**—The value of the short dramatic monologues written in the period of Browning's full maturity in genius. These poems as peculiarly excellent in both thought and form; as giving a condensed statement of Browning's essential message; as the best expressions of his characteristic poetic method; as more easily mastered than the longer poems. Hence the value of these selected brief poems as an introduction to Browning's poetry and philosophy. Place in the work of Browning of the four to be discussed.

From these turn to two of the longer works. The place of *Paracelsus* as revealing Browning's youth and presenting one range of his central teaching. *The Ring and the Book* as his masterpiece among the longer poems. Its significance as a multiplied dramatic monologue; as the fullest statement of Browning's philosophy; as his most wonderful presentation of transfigured human life.

What should result from the study of these portions of Browning's work.

**The life of Browning (1812-1889).**—Browning unlike most poets in the character of his life. Everywhere affirmative, positive, yet in true harmony with the noblest ideals. No apology needed in his case: he lived his faith, in both personal and vocational life.

Unusual character of his childhood. Camberwell; family background; early tastes. Dedication to poetry from childhood.

Young manhood of Browning. Period of restlessness: its probable significance in his life. First great work: *Pauline*, published at 21; *Paracelsus* at 23. Great difference between the two. Significance of the early struggle with deep problems. Compare Tennyson's work at the same age.

**Period of dramas.**—Early association with actors and interest in the stage. Character of Browning's dramas. Considerable measure of public success with them.

**Epoch of full maturity.**—Browning's finding of himself and of the true leading in his work. Turning away from the field in which he had won some public response. Loss of his audience. Prejudice against his work and attacks upon it. For twenty years Browning working steadily on with little response beyond the limited circle of individual admirers and friends.

Turn of the tide when Browning about fifty. Steady growth of appreciation from that time onward. His position well established at the time of his death in 1889.

Thus remarkable spectacle of this twenty years of straightforward, undoubting work, in the face of misappreciation and abuse. One main cause of Browning's attitude the deep personal relationship of his life.

**Browning's personal life.**—Story of the love-affair with Elizabeth Barrett. Unusual circumstances of the marriage. The ordinary counsels, biological and prudential, under such circumstances. Yet Browning's love and married life one of the few personal relationships we are privileged to know about which help us to recognize the heights that are attainable in the most wonderful aspect of human life.

The Browning letters. The life in Italy. Effect of his greatest personal experience on Browning's poetry. Life and work after the death of his wife.

**Browning's supreme interest.**—The study of soul development through critical moments of experience. Browning's belief that a man is proved by the crowning experience of his life. Hence the study of these critical moments should throw light before and after and reveal the meaning of his whole existence. Different types of moments significant for different characters. Illustrate: *Abt Vogler*; *Andrea del Sarto*; *Cleon*.

**Browning's poetic method.**—The dramatic monologue the natural vehicle for embodying Browning's interest in human life. Full maturing of his poetry with his recognition and acceptance of this fact.

Compare Browning's interest and method with those of other poets: Æschylus, Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare. The soliloquies of Hamlet, strung together without context, as an illustration of Browning's typical work in content and form. Expression of Browning's characteristic interest and method even in works more objectively dramatic: illustrations.

**Adaptation of form to content.**—Browning too wise to plow fields in white gloves. His aim, not to make monotonously musical verse, but to give adequate and harmonious expression to his thoughts and characters. Measure of his success in this. Variety of his poetic forms in both music and imagery. His achievement at his best and at his worst.

**Personal element in Browning.**—Browning not purely dramatic as Shakespeare. While never wearing his heart on his sleeve, always directly or indirectly expressing his essential attitude and faith. The poet behind each of his characters.

**Rabbi Ben Ezra.**—This poem showing perhaps as well as any in all Browning's work his essential message and characteristic method.

The historical Rabbi Ben Ezra: his work; his theory of immortality. Situation of the poem.

Stanza-form in the poem. Type of music and imagery; adaptation to the character.

The view of old age. Quick change in thought. Characteristics of youth and value of its "divine discontent." Browning's thought of life as a growth. Hence acceptance of pain and unfulfilled effort and aspiration where life results. Glad recognition of the good meaning in both body and spirit.

Return in stanza XIII to the initial thought of the poem: illustration of the movement of Browning's thought: compare deep conversation

The view of age as a resting-point between two courses of action, enabling one to gather up the meaning of the first before turning to the second

Rabbi Ben Ezra's faith in the eternity of life: is it Browning's? Reasons for the assurance of immortality.

The new turn to the metaphor of the Potter's Wheel. Conception of the relation of God and the soul. Again grounds for the faith.

The positive message.—Reasons for identifying Browning's view of life essentially with that taken in the poem: (1) mood and spirit of the whole; (2) obvious identification of poet and character; (3) outside evidence from other direct expressions of Browning's faith.

Browning's glad acceptance of human life: in youth and age; in pain and joy; in body and spirit, since through all may be growth up toward that image of God in which we are potentially made.

## TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION.

1. How far are we justified in identifying Browning's personal faith with the views given in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*?
2. Compare the view of old age in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* with that given in the first book of Plato's *Republic*.
3. Rabbi Ben Ezra's theory of immortality.
4. Browning's view of the life of the senses.
5. Why cannot life be judged by its results in work alone?
6. Compare *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and Tennyson's *Ancient Sage*.
7. What is the moral value of discontent?
8. The construction and value of the stanza-form in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.
9. The sources of Browning's faith in God and immortality.
10. Compare Rabbi Ben Ezra's philosophy in the poem with Browning's expression of faith in *Prospice*, the *Epilogue to Asolando*, the *Reverie* (in *Asolando*) and *La Saisiaz*.



## REFERENCES.

See the suggestions to students, p. 45, and the general book list, pp. 46-51. Books starred are of special value in connection with this course; those double-starred are texts for study and discussion or are otherwise of first importance.

Browning, \*\**Rabbi Ben Ezra*; \*\**Epilogue to Asolando*; \*\**Prospice*; \**Reverie* (in *Asolando*); \**La Saisiaz*. Browning, R. and E. B., \**Letters*. Browning, E. B., *Letters*. Berdoe, *Browning's Message to His Time*, pp. 1-70, 193-213. Brooke, *The Poetry of Robert Browning*, chapter I, Browning and Tennyson. Bulkeley, *The Reasonable Rhythm of Some of Browning's Poems*. Carpenter, *The Religious Spirit in the Poets*. Chesterton, \**Robert Browning*. Corson, \**Introduction to Browning*, pp. 3-31, 72-98, 130-133. Dowden, \**Robert Browning*. Fotheringham, *Studies of the Mind and Art of Browning*. Gosse, *Robert Browning*. Herford, *Robert Browning*. Mrs. Orr, *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*. Rolfe, *Browning's Mastery of Rhyme*, in *Boston Browning Society Papers*, pp. 164-172. Royce, *Browning's Theism*, in *Boston Browning Society Papers*, pp. 7-34. Sharp, *Life of Browning*. Symons, *Introduction to Browning*. Waugh, *Robert Browning*.

## II. MUSIC AND THE SPIRIT: ABT VOGLER.

"Music is the harmonious voice of creation; an echo of the invisible world; one note of the divine concord which the entire universe is destined one day to sound:—how can you hope to seize that note if not by elevating your minds to the contemplation of the universe, viewing with the eye of faith things invisible to the unbelieving, and compassing the whole creation in your study and affection?"

—Joseph Mazzini, *Life and Writings*, volume IV, p. 8.

### LECTURE OUTLINE.

**Introduction.**—*Abt Vogler*, like *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, a poem giving a direct statement of Browning's essential faith and also a typical expression of his poetic method. Yet in *Abt Vogler* a further element: the philosophy of music; and through the experience of the musical artist a mystical, spiritual vision.

The value of the dramatic monologue in the expression of such a spiritual faith and philosophy. The difference between a dogmatic theory of life and an artistic presentation of how life looks from the point of view of a certain height of experience. What the latter does for us: (1) In our appreciation of human beings; (2) In our recognition of the deep meaning of life; (3) In our hold upon the bases of faith. The distinction between saying "this is true of life," and "life looks so from this point of experience." Contrast wisdom and knowledge; the truth of poetry and the truth of philosophy.

**The historical Abt Vogler (1749–1814).**—Early dedication to music and the church. Original and virile mind and character. Range of public success in several lands. Great pupils. Bitter enemies, who regarded him as a charlatan. Work as musical composer, inventor, artist.

Browning's interest in the forceful, path-making type of character. Significance of his choice of Abt Vogler, instead of a more conventional type of artist, to interpret experience in creative art.

Browning's own love of music. What it meant in his life. Hence his preparation for the study in the poem.

**Situation in the poem.**—Abt Vogler presented in the moment just after he has been extemporizing on the instrument of his own invention. This as illustrating the highest point in musical art, where the artist who composes and the artist who executes are one, and the creative energy flows out in instantaneous expression. Value for Browning's purpose of this bridging of the chasm between composition and execution ordinarily present in music. Significance that the instrument through which he finds expression is also the child of the artist's genius. The moment that of perfect creating, where the impulse and thought of the heart flow instantaneously forth in adequate and harmonious form. Thus the situation of the poem indeed one of those critical moments of experience in which a soul is tested and revealed, and which Browning so delighted to study.

Browning's question: how does art and how does life appear from the view-point of Abt Vogler's supreme experience? Browning's belief that life is tested at high-water mark. Truth as revealed on the heights. The higher we climb, the truer is the perspective from which life is seen. Hence the value of great experiences and of art as an expression and interpretation of them. Illustrations from human life and history of the truth of Browning's view.

**Form of the poem.**—Abt Vogler's soul vibrant with the most intense emotion, he bursts into poetic expression. Adaptation of the long, six-foot, eight-line stanza, with its predominance of dactylic feet, to the mood of the poem. Organ-like roll in the strong music of the poem. Alliteration as distinctly adding to this impression.

Imagery of the poem as equally adapted to the character and situation. Browning's reversal of the conventional comparison of architecture and music. Music as liquid architecture, the artist's thought flowing out into the many-pinnacled temple of sound with no slow process of time and labor existing as barrier between idea and execution. Abt Vogler's images all in dramatic truth to the character.

**Stanzas I-III.**—Abt Vogler's hunger that his wonderful achievement might last. Solomon's legendary magic no more marvelous in its results than this temple of sound Abt Vogler has raised. His wish that it might last as only a natural expression of that hunger for permanence that is one of the two bottom desires of the human heart.

**Stanzas IV, V.**—Art creative like Nature, thus lifting us into harmony with her. Sense of coöperation of the universe with us in every act of creation.

The power of music to lift us to a point of spiritual appreciation where past and future seem real now. Contrast the standards of



time and space with the standards of the soul. Compare Goethe's Dedication to *Faust*.

Stanzas VI, VII: the philosophy of music.—Abt Vogler's view of the miracle in music. His statement of his own art from within, of the other arts from without; thus giving the positive excellence of music, and the limitations of painting and poetry.

In music form sublimated: each sound created only to be annulled the next instant by another. Through the succession of births and deaths of the musical sounds the arousing of a series of emotional states in the hearer. Thus music bridging more immediately than the other arts the chasm between body and spirit. To explain how the series of psychical states springs from the series of physical forms would be to solve the riddle of the universe.

Transition to spiritual philosophy: stanzas VIII, IX.—With stanza VII close of the first movement of the poem, concerned with the narration of Abt Vogler's experience. The remaining stanzas giving the interpretation of the experience. Type of experience Abt Vogler represents; thus what music can symbolize.

No comfort to the musical extemporizer that other temples of sound may be born as this that is gone was born. So no comfort to the human heart that there may be a succession of experiences.

“Each Morn a thousand Roses brings, you say;  
Yes, but where leaves the Rose of Yesterday?”

Hunger for the eternity of the particular experience.

But is the music gone? Compare the experience surviving in the soul of the man. I am the net resultant of all my yesterdays. Thus the temple of sound surviving in the soul of the artist; the wealth of changing experience in the character of the man.

Leap from this fact to the belief in eternity. Browning not arguing from desire to realization. The argument: as yesterday and to-day are justified by their result in my unfolding life, so I may dare to trust to-morrow. Worth of such an argument.

Stanzas X, XI: View of good and evil.—As only that which is positive, in harmony with the spiritual order of the universe, really lives on, so evil is negation, “silence implying sound.” Hence from the point of view of the whole of life, possible to accept even the moral darkness and shadows of life as we know it.

Splendid enthusiasm in this ringing song of Abt Vogler's faith. Note: Browning does not say “these things are true”; but “life looks this way from the point of spiritual vision Abt Vogler has reached through his creative art.” The underlying question: dare we trust

such a vision, or is it a cheating illusion, while the prosaic sand-wastes we plod over after descending from the mountain are the truth of life? Browning's unhesitating and emphatic answer to this question. Note: not necessary that we should be able to prove or disprove; but important that we should know what we may dare to believe as the basis of our lives. A kind of heroism demanded in faith: we must dare to cling to what we have seen in our highest experiences, and to brave life as if the loftiest that has come to us were true.

**Stanza XII: Conclusion.**—Descent to the common chord, the C-major of this life. Impossible to remain upon the peak of vision. Every mountain means at least two valleys. In every life moments of supreme vision; in every life dead areas of commonplace. Great living the carrying of the vision of the mountain across the sand-wastes and into even the valley of the shadow in the assurance that if we do so faithfully the mountains will appear in the distance, and by and by the vision—a new vision—will come again.

#### TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION.

1. What is the significance of Browning's love of unusual characters and subjects?
2. The historic Abt Vogler.
3. The metrical structure in *Abt Vogler*. Compare that in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.
4. The imagery in *Abt Vogler*. Compare that in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.
5. The significance of the dramatic moment chosen to interpret Abt Vogler.
6. Is Abt Vogler just to painting and poetry?
7. Why has music so important a religious function?
8. What gives music its superiority to the other arts in expressing the Infinite?
9. What is the reason for choosing the experience of the musician as a vehicle for interpreting the highest spiritual life?
10. What ground is there for believing that "there shall never be one lost good"?
11. What advantage has the poetical expression of Browning's faith in *Abt Vogler* over a dogmatic statement of the same view of life?
12. Compare *Abt Vogler* and *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha*.
13. Compare *Abt Vogler* and *With Charles Avison in Parleyings with Certain People*.

## REFERENCES.

Browning, \*\**Abt Vogler*; \*\* *Saul*; \**Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha*; \**A Toccata of Galuppi's*; \**With Charles Avison in Parleyings with Certain People*. Beale, *The Religious Teaching of Browning*. Berdoe, \**Browning and the Christian Faith*. Brooke, \**The Poetry of Browning*, chapter V. Corson, *Introduction to Browning*, pp. 122-126. Dawson, *Makers of Modern English*, chapters XXVI-XXIX. Fotheringham, *Studies of the Mind and Art of Browning*, chapter XVII. Jones, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher*. Mazzini, *Life and Writings*, volume IV, pp. 1-55, \**The Philosophy of Music*. Ormerod, \**Abt Vogler, the Man*; \**Some Notes on Browning's Poems Referring to Music*. Pigou, *Browning as a Religious Teacher*. Mrs. Turnbull, *Abt Vogler*.

### III. THE STUDY OF PERSONALITY: ANDREA DEL SARTO.

"My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul: little else is worth study. I, at least, always thought so—you, with many known and unknown to me, think so,—others may one day think so."

—Browning, in letter to J. Milsand, prefatory to *Sordello*.

#### LECTURE OUTLINE.

**Introduction.**—*Andrea del Sarto* widely different from the two preceding studies: there a direct expression of Browning's faith and attitude through the medium of two great historical characters; here the study of a subtle personality widely different from Browning in fundamental reaction on life. No question as to Browning's own attitude toward the problems presented in *Andrea del Sarto*; but a further aspect of his work—the study of personality. Wide range of Browning's poems in which this is the dominant interest. *Andrea del Sarto* one of the greatest of these.

A further interest in *Andrea del Sarto* in the study of the historical character. Yet even if it were decided that Browning failed in the interpretation of the Florentine painter, the main value of the poem as a study of human character and the main truth to the problems of personal life remaining.

The historical *Andrea del Sarto* (1487–1531).—*Andrea* living just in the crowning period of the Florentine renaissance: contemporaneous with Michael Angelo, Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci. Great interest to the students of art in *Andrea*'s work through its technical excellence and the marvelous ease of *Andrea*'s execution. In drawing, grouping, color, light and shadow, *Andrea* a master for subsequent artists.

**Vasari's story.**—Our chief knowledge of *Andrea* coming from Vasari's *Life*. Question as to the truth of Vasari's statements. Story of the youthful painter. His questionable marriage. The one flight. Return to Florence at Lucrezia's demand. Subsequent dishonor. Hack work. Vasari's pathetic account of *Andrea*'s death.



Tendency to question Vasari's account to-day. Yet, as a pupil of Andrea's, Vasari should have known the facts; and his story should be accepted unless we believe him guilty of deliberate falsifying. The poem following strictly Vasari's account.

**Andrea's paintings.**—Andrea's work chiefly in Florence. Great beauty in all his paintings: one's first impression from them that Browning's interpretation of the character is wrong. Yet, as our study proceeds, a more and more perplexing question. In spite of beauty, ease of execution, soft mingling of light and shade, something elusive in all Andrea's work. Compare his *Madonna of the Harpies*, *Young St. John*, *Deposition from the Cross*. Moods which he could interpret. Crowning expression in his *Last Supper* at San Salvi. Self-revelation in his portraits.

Suggestion in all Andrea's work of something greater unattained. Sense in which his reach did exceed his grasp. Thus failure from the point of view of his own unattained ideal, in spite of the great work he really achieved. Substantial truth therefore of the poem to the historical character; only, the poem must be read in the light of the remarkable work Andrea accomplished.

**Situation of the poem.**—Evening: the twilight drawing down; Andrea in his Florentine studio, looking out of the window at Fiesole and Mount Morello: speaking half to himself, half to the wife who sits condescendingly beside him. Thus the moment chosen one of quiet, half-sad meditation, when Andrea's life lies clear in perspective and he can sum up to himself its meaning. The poem one of the best illustrations of the revelation of a character through a critical moment of experience by means of the dramatic monologue.

**Verse form and imagery.**—Wonderful delicacy of the music in the blank verse of the poem, expressing the moan of a heart whose despair is hopeless. Evidence of Browning's mastery of exquisite expression when he chose to use it.

**Type of images used in the poem;** adaptation to the character. Contrast the imagery of *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *Abt Vogler*. Thus again evidence of the true dramatic power of Browning, in identifying himself with the spirit of his character and clothing the latter in appropriate form.

**The interpretative mood.**—Variety of moods in Andrea's life; but the one recurring beneath all the rest and revealing the real heart of his life. This as the mood of the poem.

**Husband and wife.**—Andrea's sensitive appreciation of Lucrezia's beauty; yearning for some response to his love for her, but accepting quietly the fact that there is no answer. Timidly pleading that she sit by him through the evening hour; grateful that she does so without

too great restlessness. Holding her bodily presence for the moment; and recognizing that there is no way he can hold her thought and desire.

How such a woman can attract such a man and hold him tangled in the charm of her irresponsive sensuousness. The pity of it!

**Andrea's view of life.**—How philosophy and conduct mold each other. One's view of life simply the horizon of one's own world of action. Thus Andrea believes in blind fate, because his will has broken against obstacles he could not surmount. Measure of truth and of mistake, therefore, in his view of the world and of his own life.

**Andrea's despair.**—In this quiet hour Andrea's return to the broken dream. All the old desire surging back upon him, with a crushing sense of the impossibility of its fulfillment. Thus quiet despair. This as so much deeper than the despair that cries out passionately. Thus Andrea: the wild bird rises once more to beat its breast against the inexorable bars of the cage; then, fresh-wounded, droops hopeless on the floor.

In the pathetic intimacy of this evening hour Andrea's revelation to his wife of the one great compliment he had received—Michael Angelo's word he had cherished all these years as the symbol of what he might have been. Lucrezia's obliviousness, asking a moment later whose word! Gush of feeling to Andrea's lips and eyes; repression; despair again. And then the Cousin's whistle!

The one more chance Andrea craves. Recognition that it is impossible. Acceptance of fate—fate now, but which his will is responsible for. Mood with which the poem closes.

**The poem and the painter.**—Wonderful revelation of the deep things of human life in this subtle study of personality; yet also substantial truth to the historical character. Leaving the gossip tradition aside, the Andrea of the poem the man who painted the pictures that hang in Florence. The sensitive spirit, delicately responsive to every appeal from the sensuous world, but lacking the firm center of masculine self-control and self-direction, as the background from which spring those subtle, beautiful, elusive paintings that perplex us in the galleries of Florence.

**Browning and Andrea.**—How an artist can interpret his dramatic counterpart—the type that embodies the weakness of his own strength. So Browning and Andrea: contrast the two marriages; the life in Casa Guidi and the picture hanging in the Pitti Palace opposite—the picture Browning wrote his poem to describe.

Browning's view of Andrea's tragedy. Causes of the tragedy. Was it inevitable? Suggestion by dramatic irony of what the life of love and the life of work should be.

## TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION.

1. Compare the verse-form in *Andrea del Sarto* with that in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *Abt Vogler*.
2. Compare the imagery in *Andrea del Sarto* with that in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *Abt Vogler*.
3. Has Browning succeeded in giving a true interpretation of the historical *Andrea del Sarto*?
4. Compare the relative values of the study of personal life and the interpretation of a historical character in *Andrea del Sarto*.
5. Compare *Andrea del Sarto* and Tennyson's *Romney's Remorse*.
6. The causes of *Andrea del Sarto's* failure.
7. Compare *Andrea del Sarto* with other poems of Browning dealing with the renaissance, as *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*.
8. Contrast the study of personal life in *Andrea del Sarto* and in *A Forgiveness*.
9. Compare the view of personal life given in *Andrea del Sarto* and in *Any Wife to Any Husband*.
10. Contrast Browning's personal experience with that of *Andrea del Sarto*.
11. Can Browning's own philosophy of personal life be discovered in *Andrea del Sarto*?

## REFERENCES.

Browning, *\*\*Andrea del Sarto*; *\*\*Fra Lippo Lippi*; *\*The Bishop Orders His Tomb*; *\*Pictor Ignatus*; *\*James Lee's Wife*; *\*A Woman's Last Word*; *\*Any Wife to Any Husband*; *\*A Forgiveness*. Brooke, *Poetry of Browning*, chapter V, *\*The Poet of Art*. Burton, *Literary Likings*, pp. 150-171, *Renaissance Pictures in Browning's Poetry*. Corson, *\*Introduction to Browning*, pp. 32-71, 113-116. Fleming, *Andrea del Sarto*. Fotheringham, *Studies of the Mind and Art of Browning*, chapter XV. Grant, *Browning's Art in Monologue*, in *Boston Browning Society Papers*, pp. 35-66. Ormerod, *Andrea del Sarto and Abt Vogler*. Tennyson, *\*Romney's Remorse*. Vasari, *Lives of the Painters*, volume IV, pp. 169-202, *\*Andrea del Sarto*. Whitman, *Browning in Relation to Painting*.



#### IV. THE PORTRAYAL OF FAILURE: CLEON.

"For it is with this world, as starting-point and basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves: the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned. The spiritual comprehension may be infinitely subtilized, but the raw material it operates upon must remain. There may be no end of the poets who communicate to us what they see in an object with reference to their own individuality; what it was before they saw it, in reference to the aggregate human mind, will be as desirable to know as ever."

—Browning, *Essay on Shelley*, p. 285.

"Why stay we on the earth unless to grow?"

—Browning, *Cleon*, p. 84.

#### LECTURE OUTLINE.

**Introduction.**—A further type of dramatic monologue in *Cleon*: the primary interest a study of failure on the basis of what Browning considers a false philosophy of life. In *Andrea del Sarto* failure in personal life, in love and work. Cleon rich, honored, successful, the friend of princes and chief artist of his time, yet the rose of life dust and ashes in his hands.

Cleon an imaginary character typifying the epoch of decadent Greek culture. Thus interest in Browning's interpretation of the epoch as well as in his study of the significance for any time of Cleon's philosophy of life.

Browning's own faith opposite to that of Cleon; thus suggested by dramatic irony in the poem. Yet Browning's essential attitude as evident through the indirect expression in *Cleon* as in its affirmative embodiment in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *Abt Vogler*.

**Character and epoch of Cleon.**—Instructive character of the declining Greek world. Refinement of culture following upon virility of manhood. Interest transferred from public to private life. Difficulty in life and faith in such an age. Resemblance between the epoch of Cleon and our own.

Cleon a perfect type of his age. A finished artist in many fields; poet, philosopher, with a delicate sensitiveness to the world of sensuous appeal as great as that of Andrea del Sarto; but honored and successful, with a wide relation to the world.

**Form of the poem.**—Exquisite-ness of the music and imagery of the poem, thus expressive of Cleon's spirit. Perfect adaptation of form to content. Browning's use of recurring images to unify the poem and give atmosphere. How the spirit of the whole is revealed in the music and imagery of the opening lines.

**Situation of the poem.**—Interesting variation of the dramatic monologue. Cleon, having just received a letter accompanied by a wealth of gifts from his friend Protus, one of the petty Greek tyrants, sits down to write his thanks and answer the king's questions. Thus the poem is Cleon's letter.

Compare the interpretative moment chosen to reveal the character in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *Abt Vogler*, and *Andrea del Sarto* with that selected here. The king's question: "Life fails for me, are you who see and paint life happy?"; and in rising to answer this tragic question Cleon revealing the meaning of his character and experience.

**Cleon's view of life.**—Dramatic irony in the quotation prefixed to the poem. Even among the Greeks, Browning thinks, a conception that might have solved Cleon's perplexity.

Cleon's view of joy as the use and end of life; yet not vulgar joy. The refined epicureanism that seeks some loftier happiness than the mere satisfaction of brute instincts. Revelation of Cleon's vibrant response to every appeal from the world of sensuous beauty in his description of the "one lyric woman."

**The letter's first question.**—Cleon's pride in the wonderful range of his accomplishment. Yet haunting sense of failure in it all. His life overshadowed by the simple great of old. His effort to find comfort in the variety of his achievements and the many-sidedness of his culture. Tendency to this pseudo-originality in every late age. The true relation to history. Impossible to know too much of the past; but possible to know a great deal and be incapable of vigorous action in the present; thus to have life overshadowed by great yesterdays and to seek novelty for originality. The true value of the past as inspiration for the present.

Cleon's failure to see this. Contrast Browning's own view. Cleon's hunger for progress, yet despair within. Causes of his attitude.

**The second question.**—With honor, fame and works that will live behind him is Cleon happy? Cleon's pathetic answer.

Self-consciousness as the peculiar mark of man. Does it mean progress beyond the life of the brute? Growth of a world of desire

with the conscious life, yet power to answer desire through the senses as under rigid limitations which grow more narrow through the very effort for culture that brings to birth the wider desires. The image of the Naiad. Contrast the view taken of discontent and struggle in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. Compare Emerson's *Sphinx*.

Hence Cleon's blind problem and his deepening despair. The point of view from which there may be an answer to his problem; but Cleon struggling within a closed circle and unable to break through it to a higher circle of ideas.

The joy-hunger.—Intensity of Cleon's desire for what seems to him life. The folly of trying to satisfy it by promising an immortality in works one leaves behind. Compare Hamlet's bitter statement to Horatio.

Cleon's expression of the characteristic Greek view of old age and death. Contrast Rabbi Ben Ezra's view. Causes for the difference in attitude. Unquestioning rejection of all hope of immortality by Cleon: reasons for his despair.

Paul's preaching.—Cleon's patronizing attitude toward the "barbarian Jew." His assurance that "our philosophy" is the only enlightened view. Yet St. Paul's preaching as emphasizing the very conceptions which would have solved Cleon's bitter problem and transformed his despair into strong, hopeful life. Thus the dramatic irony of the poem and the suggestion by indirection of Browning's own view of life.

Ethical value of the poem.—Significance of the poem as contrasted with a philosophical argument against the epicurean philosophy. Value in presenting the philosophy in the life with which it naturally clothes itself. Every creed tested finally by the fruit it brings forth in life. Hence the trenchant significance of Browning's arraignment of a merely hedonistic philosophy of life through his portrayal of the failure of Cleon.

Contrast in value such a dramatic monologue as *Cleon* with the poems that are merely subtle presentations of personality.

The vigor of Browning's message. Cleon's age resembling ours. The many who are caught in Cleon's dark riddle to-day. The splendid affirmation of the worth of life in Browning. His glad acceptance, not only of joy but pain, not only of peace but restless discontent, since to him life means endless growth in life. Tonic value of his teaching for such an age as ours.

## TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION.

1. The value of Browning's *Cleon* as compared with a philosophical argument against epicureanism.
2. Browning's view of Christianity as implied in *Cleon*.
3. Contrast true originality with Cleon's view of originality.
4. The causes of Cleon's despair.
5. If faith in immortality be lost, is there any answer to Cleon's despair?
6. The quality and music of the verse in *Cleon*. Compare in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *Abt Vogler* and *Andrea del Sarto*.
7. The imagery in *Cleon*. Compare that in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *Abt Vogler* and *Andrea del Sarto*.
8. Browning's use of the "tower" image.
9. Compare *Cleon* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra* in the view taken of human discontent.
10. Compare the view of old age in *Cleon* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. What causes the difference?
11. How can Browning's philosophy of life be discovered in *Cleon*?
12. The type of classical interest in Browning.
13. Browning's interpretation of Greece: compare *Cleon* with *Balaustion's Adventure* and *Aristophanes' Apology*.

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Browning, \*\**Cleon*; \**Balaustion's Adventure*; \**Aristophanes' Apology*; \**A Death in the Desert*. The Bible, \*Acts, chapter XVII. Bradford, *Spiritual Lessons from the Brownings*. Brooke, *Poetry of Browning*, chapters XI, XII, \**Imaginative Representation*. Bury, *Browning's Philosophy*. Hyde, *Art of Optimism as Taught by Browning*. Jones, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher*. Nettleship, \**Robert Browning*, pp. 326-338. Pigou, *Browning as a Religious Teacher*.



## V. THE TRAGEDY OF THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE: PARACELSUS.

"We turn with stronger needs to the genius of an opposite tendency—the subjective poet of modern classification. He, gifted like the objective poet, with the fuller perception of nature and man, is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below as to the One above him, the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth,—an ultimate view ever aspired to, if but partially attained, by the poet's own soul. Not what man sees, but what God sees,—the *Ideas* of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand,—it is toward these that he struggles. Not with the combination of humanity in action, but with the primal elements of humanity, he has to do; and he digs where he stands,—preferring to seek them in his own soul as the nearest reflex of that absolute Mind, according to the intuitions of which he desires to perceive and speak. Such a poet does not deal habitually with the picturesque groupings and tempestuous tossings of the forest trees, but with their roots and fibres naked to the chalk and stone. He does not paint pictures and hang them on the walls, but rather carries them on the retina of his own eyes: we must look deep into his human eyes, to see those pictures on them. He is rather a seer, accordingly, than a fashioner, and what he produces will be less a work than an effluence. That effluence cannot be easily considered in abstraction from his personality,—being indeed the very radiance and aroma of his personality, projected from it but not separated. Therefore, in our approach to the poetry, we necessarily approach the personality of the poet; in apprehending it we apprehend him, and certainly we cannot love it without loving him. Both for love's and for understanding's sake we desire to know him, and, as readers of his poetry, must be readers of his biography also."

—Browning, *Essay on Shelley*, pp. 283, 284.

### LECTURE OUTLINE.

**Introduction.**—The brief poems of Browning's mature manhood as the most characteristic expression of his genius in both thought and form. Return from these to the period of Browning's youth and to the work which was prophetic of all he was to accomplish.

Thus *Paracelsus*, published when Browning was 23, of great interest

in connection with his development. Distinctly a young man's poem, with the restlessness, vast ambitions and youthful sense of failure that so often mark adolescent genius; yet treating deep ethical and psychological problems with remarkable insight into human life. Interesting how many of Browning's central teachings find expression in this first great poem.

Further, *Paracelsus* interpreting a remarkable epoch of human life, and as a poem characterized by great beauty in its highest portions. Thus variety of points of view from which the poem may be studied.

The historical Paracelsus (1493?–1541).—The Paracelsus who lived in the early sixteenth century a man of remarkable and original genius. Breaking away from his early conventional studies; dedicating himself to the study (1) Of empirical science, not through books, but through direct investigation in chemistry and medicine; (2) Of all phases of human life; (3) Of mystical philosophy. Significance of the combination of his interests: compare Giordano Bruno. Much of his teaching since proved erroneous, yet many ideas and discoveries of permanent value. In the sixteenth century still possible to believe in the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life. Hence superstitions of Paracelsus and seeming traits of the charlatan. Yet sincerity of Paracelsus. A pathmaker, bitterly contemptuous toward established learning, naturally violently opposed by conventional teachers. His wide travels and varied contact with human life. Circumstances of his death at Salzburg in 1541. Value of his mystical philosophy and range of his real contribution. His relation to the scientific and theological upheaval in the time of Erasmus and Luther.

The poem in relation to the history.—Attraction to Browning in such a character as Paracelsus; attacked as charlatan but aspiring out and beyond mankind. Significance that Browning chose Paracelsus as the subject of his first great work. Compare the first scenes of *Faust* written before Goethe was 25. The youth of genius as expressed in Browning.

Truth of the poem to the historical Paracelsus. Browning's claim: how far justified. Vitality of his interpretation of the epoch, whatever be the verdict regarding his rendering of the historical character.

Form of the poem.—*Paracelsus* really five dramatic monologues, with the interjection of a few questions, suggestions and comments by the friends of the chief character. The dramatic monologue here brought less strictly within true artistic limits than in the great poems of Browning's middle period. Yet vigor of his use of it and characteristic expression of his interest in human life.

Beauty and freedom of the blank verse. The number of passages of unusual excellence. The larger amount of nature description than in

Browning's later work. Exquisiteness of the inserted lyrics; how they show Shelley's influence. The highest passages of *Paracelsus* as rising in poetic beauty to the level of Browning's best work.

**Scene I.**—Würzburg, 1512; Paracelsus, 19. His farewell to his friends, Festus and Michal (wife of Festus), before his departure on his wandering travels. His discontent with the university work; aspiration toward a more real and universal knowledge. His sense that it would be death to live the commonplace life—even of learning. This attitude as marking the youth of genius. Good and evil in it: compare in Faust, Goethe, Browning.

**Friendship with Festus.**—Relation of the two young men to each other. Remonstrances of Festus and Michal, yet faith in their friend and in his vast dreams. Measure of dramatic reality in Festus and Michal.

**The aim of Paracelsus.**—Vagueness of the aspirations of Paracelsus, yet centering on the hunger *to know*. Compare Faust's desire. Danger in the pride that seeks to be apart and above mankind.

Why Paracelsus turns to a life of wandering in order to fulfil his aim. Compare the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow—the notion that somewhere else is all that we desire. “Wo du nicht bist, dort ist das Glück!” This notion as always characteristic of youth. Pathos in its expression in Paracelsus; yet deeper significance.

Relation of the aspiration of Paracelsus to mankind. Essential purity and loftiness of his aim; yet a certain arrogance. Distinction between working for the adventitious applause of the world and desiring the warm human response. How the intellect isolates while the heart unites. Hence loneliness of Paracelsus; compare Leonardo da Vinci and Giordano Bruno.

The theory of Paracelsus that truth is within ourselves: is it Browning's? Measure of truth and error in the conception; its relation to the character of Paracelsus.

Scene I as a remarkable expression of the enthusiasms and ambitions of the youth of genius.

**Scene II.**—Paracelsus, after nine years of wandering, at the house of a Greek fortune-teller in Constantinople, writing out the disappointing story of his life. Dramatic irony in the title “Paracelsus attains.” Paracelsus wakening not only to a sense of failure, but to a recognition of the forfeiting of the joys of common human life which the vain pursuit of his aim has involved. Compare St. Francis of Assisi; Cleon; Faust in scene I.

**Aprile.**—Meeting with the dying poet. Aprile failing in seeking to love infinitely, as Paracelsus to know infinitely. In both not only the opposition between love and knowledge, but a striving for the



whole of the aspect sought, while neglecting the slow, step-by-step process through which either is attained. Compare the failure of Amiel. Yet to recognize the nature and meaning of one's failure, as Paracelsus partially does, after all, attainment.

Scene III: apparent success.—Festus visiting his friend at Basile fourteen years after scene I. Paracelsus famous and with hosts of followers in the university, where he has been appointed to a professorship. Yet applauded for what he considers his weakness and failure, while his real aims remain as unrecognized as unattained. Bitterness in such a situation. How the world unconsciously spoils a leader by compelling him to dwell in the adventitious.

Paracelsus's confession of himself to Festus; relief in such a self-revelation. Hunger of Paracelsus that his friend may see through the vanity of his success to his inner degradation and despair, that is, his reality.

Scathing arraignment of the popular teacher's audience. How they tempt him to charlatanry. Compare *Mr. Sludge, "the Medium."* Yet the truth regarding his audience Paracelsus fails to see.

Scene III as the tragedy of a leader's sufferings. Beautiful poetry into which the scene rises toward its close.

Scene IV.—Dismissal of Paracelsus because he chose to speak the truth instead of giving his audience the pretense they desired. Deeply wounded, Paracelsus expressing his despair in a wild flame of laughter, enthusiasm, contempt. Like Faust reacting against the failure of the intellect to what seems most real—the uncontrolled life of the senses. Significance that Browning, like Goethe, wrote this study of restless reaction so early.

Impossibility of returning to lost youth and the forfeited opportunities of the common life. Michal's death the last touch to the despair of Paracelsus.

Scene V.—Festus with his dying friend, 29 years since the first scene. How splendidly Festus rises in this last scene. Value in human life of such an unequal friendship.

Wonderful revelation of Paracelsus's life and experience in the broken wanderings of his dying brain. His sincerity through all, hence reality of his character.

Paracelsus's attainment.—Pride suppressed at last. Now, at the end, achievement of conceptions that make all life lie clear in the perspective of the dying hour. Ideas that make up Paracelsus's attainment: (1) At last, conception of God, of unity in all life, and of the relation of man to God. (2) Recognition of the nature and meaning of human life, its strength and weakness. (3) Conception of the relation of man to nature, and of man to his fellows in the solidar-

ity of mankind. (4) Conception of the relation of a leader to his followers, and appreciation of the higher truth of common life. (5) Lastly, recognition by Paracelsus of the reasons for his own failure.

Significance of such an attainment. The range of Browning's central teachings expressed in it. Marvelous rising of the poem toward its close.

Value of the poem.—*Paracelsus* as a work of art: chief merits and faults. Value of the poem as an interpretation of an epoch; as a study of great and permanent problems; as an expression of the character and development of the poet who gave it birth in his youth.

### TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION.

1. In what ways is *Paracelsus* typical of Browning's greatest work?
2. What are the chief faults of the monologue in *Paracelsus*?
3. The treatment of friendship in *Paracelsus*.
4. The relative value of the lyrics in *Paracelsus*.
5. Browning's character-drawing in *Paracelsus*.
6. Compare *Paracelsus* and *Faust*.
7. Contrast the treatment of Nature in *Paracelsus* and in Goethe's *Sorrows of Werther*.
8. Compare *Pauline* and *Paracelsus*.
9. In what does the central interest of *Paracelsus* lie: in the study of personality, the interpretation of an epoch, or the presentation of a great ethical problem?
10. Compare *Paracelsus* with Tennyson's early work.
11. Compare the problem of *Paracelsus* with that presented in *Sordello*.
12. Why is *Paracelsus* so much easier to read than *Sordello*?
13. Contrast Browning's poetic method in *Paracelsus* and in *Pippa Passes*: which produces the higher result?
14. Compare in artistic effectiveness *Paracelsus* and the poems previously studied.

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## VI. BROWNING'S PHILOSOPHY OF ART AND LIFE: THE RING AND THE BOOK.

“Learn one lesson hence  
Of many which whatever lives should teach:  
This lesson, that our human speech is naught,  
Our human testimony false, our fame  
And human estimation words and wind.  
Why take the artistic way to prove so much?  
Because, it is the glory and good of Art,  
That Art remains the one way possible  
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.

\* \* \* \* \*

Art,—wherein man nowise speaks to men,  
Only to mankind,—Art may tell a truth  
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,  
Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.  
So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,  
Beyond mere imagery on the wall,—  
So, note by note, bring music from your mind,  
Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived,—  
So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,  
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.”

—*The Ring and the Book*, volume II, p. 329.

### LECTURE OUTLINE.

**Introduction.**—*The Ring and the Book* Browning's longest poem and in some respects his masterpiece. Composition in the culminating period of his work, thus representing his ripest thought and fullest poetic power. Though so long a poem, true to Browning's characteristic poetic method, the dramatic monologue. *The Ring and the Book* a series of dramatic monologues centering upon one theme. Thus each portion of the poem fulfilling the functions of the brief dramatic monologues; yet in *The Ring and the Book* further: (1) The study of the reaction of the different characters upon each other; (2) The study of one series of events in relation to a group of individuals.

Thus a much broader weaving of the web of human life than in the shorter poems. Not only the study of the same critical moment in the lives of the different individuals, but the working out of all the complicated action and reaction of these upon each other. Thus *The Ring and the Book* the best opportunity to study Browning's philosophy of art and life.

**Subject of *The Ring and the Book*.**—The Roman murder case of 1698: such a story as the modern sensational newspaper would exploit to the debauching of its readers. Browning's finding of the book, part print, part manuscript, relating to the trial. The story in brief. This as the story retold, from his own point of view, by each of the speakers and actors in the poem.

**Truth versus fact.**—The painful story of the murder case not only a basis for pernicious gossip, but material through which one may see reverently into human life. The book as containing:

“Pure crude fact  
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,  
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since.”

Distinction between facts and truth. Facts the material through which truth may be discovered. How facts may lie. The greatest test of the intellect, and one of the greatest of the character, the ability to see what facts mean. The meaning of any expression of a human life evident only in true relation to the whole life embodied. Thus the evil of gossip that it paws over the external expressions of character utterly out of relation to the life clothed in them.

Thus Browning's view of truth in relation to life. We see the world from the point of our own experience and character. For man truth relative; no view absolute. Hence the vision dependent upon character: to see truth one must be true. The reaction of an individual upon any series of events a test and revelation of his character. Other factors entering into the appreciation of truth, but this of the life the basal one. Compare the people who always ring true; who, brought into the presence of a new range of facts, pierce unerringly through them to what they half-conceal and half-reveal. Such people found perhaps as often among those unlearned as among those widely read in the teaching of the past, though all sincere contact with life helps cultivate such insight.

*The Ring and the Book* as the application of this principle to a variety of characters, testing and revealing each by his reaction on the central story.

**Browning's theory of art.**—His view of truth in relation to fact as



determining Browning's philosophy of art. Because presenting truth in relation to personality, in all the color and form of life, art able to reveal the truth as is possible to no prosaic statement of fact in science or of theory in philosophy. Thus the lofty function of art: never merely to give pleasure (though that were enough), but to breed wisdom—the insight into concrete experience—to “*save the soul*.” Browning's unvarying recognition of this high function of art as a way of life. Fullest statement of his thought in *The Ring and the Book*. As God created the world, so art, using the elements of God's work, creates its world, and in so doing reveals the truth of God's world.

Hence the image of the poem: the goldsmith takes the pure gold of the mine, mixes alloy to work it, molds it into the ring and then dissipates the alloy. There remains pure gold, but more than gold—a ring, to carry human sentiment and seal a marriage. So Browning, taking the “pure crude fact” of this Roman murder story, brooding over it and mixing his soul with it, moulding it into the poem, leaves it gold, but gold shapen into the ring, fact, but fact interpreted, its truth revealed.

How this process tests the poet's own soul. For him too the vision determined by the moral reality of his character. He too can see truth only as he is true. Thus revelation of Browning, and of his character and life, in and behind all the figures of the poem.

**The first Half-Rome.**—Application to the characters of the poem of the theory of truth in relation to fact. The story culminating in the murder dropped like a stone into the midst of the pond of public opinion and its waves rolling either way. Thus the speaker for half-Rome a married man, suspicious and jealous of his wife. He naturally sides with the husband; reacts instantly on the situation from the basis of his own experience. Thus half the world chooses a side, not because that side is or is not the truth, but because through temperament, circumstances, accident, half the world naturally tends that way.

**The other Half-Rome.**—Equally accidental the reaction of the other half of the world. The speaker for this half an unmarried sentimental, inclining temperamentally to the woman's side of the story. No real appreciation of Pompilia; in fact admitting what, if true, would spoil the beauty of her character. Thus this speaker and the half-Rome he represents accidentally on the side that happens to have the truth, but without real recognition of the truth.

**Tertium Quid.**—Always when the world's opinion falls into two halves, something left over: the reaction of the third somewhat, the idle rich who regard themselves as aristocracy, too fine to take sides in the quarrels of the vulgar world. The veneer of convention separating these people from the realities of human life. Their false notion

that a polite cynicism toward love and work is a mark of their superior culture. A whole literature cursed with this damning tendency. The view of these who regard themselves as the fashionable clique further from the truth than that of either half of common opinion. Yet Caponsacchi one of the *Tertium Quid*. The power of nature's gentleman, once awakened, to go beyond the man of other type.

**Guido Franceschini.**—Browning passing next from the world's reaction to the central characters in the tragic drama. Guido the criminal. Compare with him Goethe's Mephistopheles and Shakespeare's Iago. Guido's nature mere hate and malice. As he is utterly false, so no perception of truth. His view of life mere loathsome falsehood. Of all the characters of the poem, his darkness the farthest from the light of God's truth.

**Machine-made truth.**—The center of the poem and the crowning expression of Browning's insight into human life in *Caponsacchi*, *Pompilia* and *The Pope*. These books reserved for further discussion. Not content with studying the general reactions of public opinion, Browning considers further the process the world sanctions to extract truth from facts and circumstances. Thus the speeches of the two hired counsellors whose business it is to find one side of the story true. Effect of this attitude on their ability to see the truth. Browning's scathing arraignment of the process of law. His view that the lawyer, paid to see the truth all on one side, is biased beforehand so that there is no hope of his seeing into the heart of such a human tragedy as furnishes the theme of the poem. Measure of justice in Browning's attitude. Compare the views of great lawyers such as Lincoln.

Thus the defender of Guido: garrulous, conceited, pompous, aiming to present a brilliant classical argument in defense of Guido and thus conquer his legal adversary. The one touch of humanity in him his love of his boy.

So the opposing counsel: Pompilia's defender seeking through the finesse of argumentation to work upon the judges. His utter failure to appreciate Pompilia and Caponsacchi; compare what he is willing to concede regarding them! Something terrible in this machine process of law which, after all, merely interprets and carries further the reaction of the two halves of Rome.

**Conclusion.**—Thus the relation of the different types and individuals to the truth; but behind them all Browning. His moral reality, his experience, his contact with human life as his equipment for interpreting the human story. The full exemplification of his own philosophy of art in the poem.

## TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION.

1. Compare in poetic method *Pippa Passes* and *The Ring and the Book*: which method is the more effective?
2. Compare in artistic and philosophic value *Paracelsus* and *The Ring and the Book*.
3. Browning's theory of art.
4. Browning's view of the sources of insight into the truth of human life.
5. Could any of the books of *The Ring and the Book* be omitted or much shortened without seriously hampering Browning's aim?
6. Is Guido a possible character?
7. Compare Guido with Goethe's Mephistopheles and Shakespeare's Iago.
8. Compare the measure of insight into human life in the *Tertium Quid* and the two halves of Rome.
9. Is Browning's view of the legal counsellors and the process of law just?
10. Compare in artistic and philosophic value *The Ring and the Book* and the brief poems studied.
11. How far does Browning fulfil his own theory of art in *The Ring and the Book*?

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## VII. THE CROWNING REVELATION OF MANHOOD: CAPONSACCHI.

"And surely not so very much apart  
Need I place thee, my warrior-priest,—in whom  
What if I gain the other rose, the gold,  
We grave to imitate God's miracle.

\* \* \* \* \*

Be glad thou hast let light into the world  
Through that irregular breach o' the boundary,—see  
The same upon thy path and march assured,  
Learning anew the use of soldiership,  
Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,  
Loyalty to the life's end! Ruminare,  
Deserve the initiatory spasm,—once more  
Work, be unhappy but bear life, my son!"

—The Pope's estimate of Caponsacchi, *The Ring and the Book*, vol. II, pp. 196-200.

### LECTURE OUTLINE.

**Introduction.**—The preparation for *Caponsacchi*. Culmination of the poem in the monologues by him and by Pompilia. Caponsacchi's the most perfectly dramatic of all the monologues of the poem. Compare how Browning shows greatest dramatic truth in portraying a character like himself. Contrast Shakespeare's ability to paint with equal truth a Desdemona, an Othello and an Iago.

Situation at the opening of Caponsacchi's monologue: Pompilia in the hospital dying of the stabs inflicted by her husband: Caponsacchi, who sought to save her, recalled by the judges who had sentenced him for his attempt, and asked to tell once more the story by the light of the terrible event. His whole nature quivering under the tragedy. How his splendid manhood shines forth in the broken utterances but majestic spirit in which he begins his statement.

The relation of Caponsacchi to the truth.—Of all the characters of the poem, Caponsacchi nearest the heart of the truth, with the one

exception of Pompilia. The cause of this the truth of his spirit. Thus the many expressions of his relation to the truth. Compare (lines 116-127) his sense that the truth is now evident, but too late to save Pompilia! His perception (lines 140-143) that one great lesson of life is recognizing our own failure. His desire to show the judges the truth, that is, "Pompilia who is true," that they may appreciate her nobility and the truth thus be helpful to human beings in new cases that arise (lines 146-172).

Caponsacchi's meaning in saying Pompilia has done the good to him. Significance that he can say it in the presence of the terrible tragedy. How through Pompilia Caponsacchi was born into love and truth. Thus the marvel of personal life. Love and truth as the two absolute ends of the human spirit. Caponsacchi's hunger to serve Pompilia in the one poor way remaining to him: the telling once more of the story that her truth may appear.

The story of Caponsacchi's life.—How Caponsacchi came to be a priest; his vows discounted before taken. His careless life before Pompilia touched him and his soul wakened—the mere butterfly sipping the honey of every garden-flower. Caponsacchi before his great experience as a perfect type of the *Tertium Quid*.

His first sight of Pompilia. How immediately each soul recognized the other. Browning's success in making Pompilia stand out vividly before our eyes through the few lines of Caponsacchi's description. Contrast the vagueness of Michal in *Paracelsus*.

The reaching out of Caponsacchi's soul to help Pompilia; significance of this attitude. Guido's malicious scheme to trap both wife and priest in a ruin that would glut his hate. Opposite result because of the truth of those he would make his victims.

Pompilia's appeal.—Pompilia's first call to Caponsacchi to save her life for the sake of the life God had trusted to her. How each instantly recognized the other's *truth* and thus pierced at once through Guido's miserable cheat. How love means such a recognition of one personality by another.

Caponsacchi's answer.—The strange first effect of Pompilia's appeal upon Caponsacchi: his awakening to the majestic laws underlying all life and hence his life. Thus turned back upon the vows and duties he had been ignoring, but which take on new sacredness through the birth of his soul. Truth of this to human character, and remarkable evidence of Browning's grasp of the deepest things of human life. Compare Miriam and Donatello in *The Marble Faun*.

The second appeal.—Caponsacchi's horizon clearing; his recognition that the true service of God was the answering of the individual woman's need. The splendid directness with which he performs the service.

**The ride to Rome.**—Utter reverence of Caponsacchi toward Pompilia through all the long ride together for the sake of her safety. The source of his reverence: can love be religion?

Caponsacchi's feeling that the whole world must be transformed by the great experience that has come to him. Thus strange to him that others should go on about the same old routine of life. The value of a great experience in thus helping us to break through the heavy crust of convention and custom into the light and air and to a fresh testing of all things by the immediate standards of the soul. How all Browning's greatest work rests upon such a testing of life through his own supreme experience.

The situation when Guido overtakes Pompilia and Caponsacchi. How it appears to the world; the truth in Browning's view.

The court's previous judgment. How completely the several judges failed to see the true meaning of the situation because of their character as human beings. Caponsacchi's summing up of the whole story for the judges that they may see *the truth*.

Caponsacchi's attitude toward Guido. Is he right in regretting that he did not kill Guido? Terrible power in the lines in which he compares Guido to Judas (lines 1858-1925).

**Caponsacchi and Pompilia.**—Caponsacchi's statement that when he and Pompilia rushed each on each, the spark of truth was struck out from their souls (lines 1785-1787); and that he "assuredly did bow, was blessed by the revelation of Pompilia" (lines 1833-1841). Significance of his insistence upon the supreme service she has done him. The power of the deepest personal experiences to develop wisdom and insight in comparison with the other channels through which deep lessons may be learned.

Caponsacchi's different uses of the word "love." His repudiation of any ordinary use of the word in describing his relation to Pompilia. Absence in his attitude toward her of all selfish demand to be answered and satisfied. But hunger to serve her evermore, to lift up and protect and bless her. Deep, reverent, tender reaching out of his spirit toward her. Did Caponsacchi *love* Pompilia? The plane upon which the word must be used if we answer affirmatively.

Caponsacchi's description of her face: how wonderfully Browning has grown since portraying Michal and Palma. Sources of his power here.

The dream of what might have been but never can be! How Caponsacchi rises, and with what frankness he can tell his dream of what life would be with her, because of the purity of his attitude and—because she lies dying! The moving power of the poetry: was Browning dreaming over his own supreme loss?

Caponsacchi's closing view of life.—The way life withdraws, and the perspective of the spirit in which it appears, through the effect of the great tragedy. Caponsacchi's unwavering recognition that God's sun shines, even though his own life be utterly in the shadow. Significance that he can accept with such splendid heroism in the face of all that has come to him. Source of his power to keep the truth of life.

Browning's view that it is more important to love than to be loved. The relative effect of the two modes of love upon the human character. Compare the expression of the same truth in *The Last Ride Together*, in *Evelyn Hope*, in Browning's own experience. This the heart of all Browning's philosophy of personal life. Thus the significance of that philosophy.

Conclusion.—What lies ahead for Caponsacchi? Compare the souls in Dante's second limbo who "without hope, live on in desire." Extent to which the description applies to Caponsacchi. Has he bought the spiritual vision by the loss of certain capacities of his own life? Must it be so purchased?

The splendid heroism and majestic manhood with which the book closes. Is there in all literature a greater portrayal of manhood at once human and spiritual, masculine and transfigured, supremely loving but utterly without selfish demands?

The value of Caponsacchi and his heroic attitude toward life for our own faith and experience.

## TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION.

1. The measure of dramatic truth in Browning's portrayal of Caponsacchi.
2. Compare Caponsacchi and Paracelsus.
3. Browning's view of personal love.
4. The significance of the effect upon Caponsacchi of Pompilia's first appeal to him.
5. In what ways did Pompilia help Caponsacchi?
6. Compare Caponsacchi's relation to Pompilia with Dante's to Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*.
7. What is the relative value of great personal experience as compared with other channels through which wisdom may be attained?
8. Compare Caponsacchi and Valence in *Colombe's Birthday*.
9. Contrast Caponsacchi and the speaker in *Fifine at the Fair*.
10. Compare Caponsacchi and the men characters of *The Inn Album*.
11. The relation of Caponsacchi to *the truth*.



12. What makes it possible for Caponsacchi to accept life heroically in spite of the tragedy?
13. What possible future could there be for Caponsacchi at the conclusion of his part in the tragedy?
14. Compare the situation of Caponsacchi with that of the souls in the second limbo of Dante's *Inferno*.
15. Compare the view of personal love taken in *The Ring and the Book*, and in *The Last Ride Together*, *Evelyn Hope* and *Colombe's Birthday*.
16. Compare Caponsacchi and Shakespeare's heroes.

#### REFERENCES.

Browning, \*\**The Ring and the Book*, especially book VI, \*\*Capon-sacchi; \*\**The Last Ride Together*; \**Evelyn Hope*; \**Colombe's Birthday*; \**Fine at the Fair*; \**The Inn Album*. Buchanan, *Master Spirits*, pp. 89-109. Cooke, \**Browning's Theory of Romantic Love*, *Boston Browning Society Papers*, pp. 84-98. Innes, *Seers and Singers*, pp. 99-124. Jones, \**The Uncalculating Soul*, *Boston Browning Society Papers*, pp. 130-152. Machen, *The Bible in Browning*. Morley, *Studies in Literature*, pp. 255-285. Nettleship, *Robert Browning*, pp. 9-45. Sharp, *Victorian Poets*, pp. 40-102.

## VIII. BROWNING'S INTERPRETATION OF WOMANHOOD: POMPILIA.

"Earth's flower

She holds up to the softened gaze of God!"

—The Pope's estimate of Pompilia, *The Ring and the Book*, vol. II, p. 194.

### LECTURE OUTLINE.

**Introduction.**—As Caponsacchi is Browning's highest interpretation of manhood, so Pompilia his most wonderful reading of the woman soul. These two characters unique in literature: and the books portraying them as the heart of the whole poem.

The relation of Browning's Pompilia to the character revealed in the documents of the murder case. Browning's statement that he found her substantially as he has portrayed her. If so, the more wonder that life and not art could produce this miracle of transfigured womanhood. Browning's art none the less wonderful in revealing her to us than if she were entirely the creation of his own imagination. Of all the characters of the story, Pompilia most of all burning up into the pure, white light of truth, because of them all she is most utterly true.

**Artistic qualities of book VII.**—Browning's portrayal of Pompilia less perfectly true dramatically than his Caponsacchi. Words and images occasionally used by Pompilia not entirely in keeping with her experience and knowledge. Compare Shakespeare's lifting a character to a plane of more complete expression with Browning's tendency to make his characters at times speak his own language as well as thoughts. What this indicates of Browning's dramatic power.

Yet substantial truth to her character in Pompilia's dramatic monologue. How Browning makes her live for us. Contrast the dramatic power here and in the portrayal of Michal in *Paracelsus* and Palma in *Sordello*. Exquisite character of the verse and imagery in the most moving portions of Pompilia's monologue.

Situation in book VII.—Pompilia, mortally wounded by her husband, dying in the hospital; but before going gathers her strength together and tells over the story of her life and fate, that *the truth* (chiefly for Caponsacchi's sake) may appear.

The perspective that the dying hour brings: how the coarser realities of life seem to fade away for Pompilia, and only the spiritual meaning underneath to stand out clearly. Thus her sufferings seem far away and dream-like to her, while the two great strongholds of her faith in life—her child and Caponsacchi—stand forth unshadowed by the gloom of the past.

Pompilia's story.—Pompilia's review of her life, first outlining the brief whole and then going over in detail the salient points. Her mother. Violante's deception. Pompilia's innocent girlhood. How she grew up as it were a white lily sprung from a dung-heap. Her relation to her foster-parents. The pathetic story of her marriage: Pompilia's ignorance as well as utter innocence.

Pompilia's relation to the truth.—The view of life to which Pompilia has come. Her perception of the good alone as permanent. The dying hour acting upon her spiritual vision like Dante's Lethe and Eunoë upon his view of life. Pompilia's perfect trust: is it justified? How she exemplifies the truth, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Her insight and wisdom; these as dependent, not at all upon ordinary knowledge, but upon her character, her sufferings and her great personal experiences. How true her reaction upon every test of her experience.

Browning's view of personal life.—The opportunity in portraying Pompilia for an expression, by indirection, of Browning's view of the most intimate relations of human life. Difficulty in discussing these; purity and nobility of Browning's attitude; perhaps nowhere else is his contribution so important. His teaching that the body is the garment of the soul, that every outer expression is significant only as it embodies something deeper than itself. Thus the love that is a consecration of the spirit as what makes sacred and beautiful all relations of the outer life. Hence Pompilia entirely right in her instinctive reaction upon her relation to her husband. How any claim of "rights" or "duties" must blemish the most wonderful relationship of human life. The bases in character and experience of Browning's insight into these problems.

Pompilia's motherhood.—The two attitudes toward her child possible in such circumstances as Pompilia's: (1) Resentment of it as Guido's child; (2) A more intense love of it that the inheritance of Guido's hate might be utterly blotted out and the child be wholly wrapped about with love. Evidence of Pompilia's heroic womanhood in her

rising to the noble attitude. Her splendid response to the call of the life deeper than her life. How Pompilia rises at the point where Goethe's Margaret goes down.

The significance of Browning's interpretation of womanhood. How can a man see into a woman's soul as he reads Pompilia's? Sources of his power. The value of his teaching concerning motherhood.

Pompilia and Caponsacchi.—How Pompilia hungers to serve Caponsacchi, as he her. Thus her desire to make the truth—his truth—appear. Her story of her first sight of him. The frankness with which she expresses how her spirit immediately went out to him. Her feeling like his in the experience, but her expression even more frank and transparent. This as evidencing the higher purity of her spirit and her innocence of the world. How Caponsacchi's years of careless living and his knowledge of the world's inevitable reaction would make him withhold and explain. The power to speak frankly but delicately of the deepest things of human life as a test of the purity of one's own character.

Pompilia's account of her call to Caponsacchi and his coming. Her instantaneous recognition of him. How love involves a discovery of one life by another. The difference in Pompilia's telling of the story from Caponsacchi's. Browning's skill in differentiating the two monologues, with equally remarkable character-drawing in each. The revelation in Pompilia of what is essentially and permanently womanhood. Her pride in Caponsacchi, in his strength, courage, resourcefulness. Her cry:

“Oh, to have Caponsacchi for my guide!  
Ever the face upturned to mine, the hand  
Holding my hand across the world,—a sense  
That reads, as only such can read, the mark  
God sets on woman, signifying so  
She should—shall peradventure—be divine;  
Yet 'ware, the while, how weakness mars the print  
And makes confusion, leaves the thing men see.”

Pompilia's sense of how Caponsacchi has helped her. Her desire, for his sake, that the service should be *all* successful. Her instinctive recognition that she has the easier, Caponsacchi the harder, part. Thus the closing portion of her monologue devoted wholly to him. The marvelous poetry to which the book rises and with which it concludes. Is there anywhere a more glorious song of what personal life ought to be, and may be, when the outer life is the garment of the inner, and love is a desire, not to take, but to bless evermore?



Pompilia's exultant acceptance of the death that frees her from Guido. Absence of any spirit of hate toward him. Thus in entire love and glad acceptance of life she goes out.

**The final judgment: the Pope.**—Except Browning's own view the Pope as giving the final judgment of the story. The Pope's character—old, good, long-experienced in men and books alike. How he prepares for passing judgment on Guido and his fellow-murderers by reading a history, thus gaining a spiritual perspective. His summing up of each of the three principal characters. His decision.

The Pope's relation to the truth. His the wide, balanced vision of life in relation, due to a good character crowned by learning and widely experienced in men and events. Thus his the judgment nearest God's. Yet even he, Browning thinks, does not burn up into the white soul of the truth like Pompilia or touch the heart of the concrete meaning of life like Caponsacchi.

**The poet and the poem.**—Behind all the characters of *The Ring and the Book*, Browning. His equipment to get at *the truth*: compare in character and temperament, in experience, in study and art. Browning's personal life as the basis of his portrayal of Caponsacchi and Pompilia; the light this fact throws on the meaning of personal life.

## TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION.

1. The measure of dramatic truth in Pompilia's monologue.
2. Compare the character-drawing in *The Ring and the Book* and in *Paracelsus*.
3. Pompilia's relation to *the truth*.
4. Compare Pompilia's insight with the Pope's wisdom.
5. Why is Pompilia even more frank than Caponsacchi in telling the story of their relation to each other?
6. Compare Pompilia and Michal in *Paracelsus*.
7. Compare Pompilia and Colombe in *Colombe's Birthday*.
8. In what respects does Browning excel in his portrayal of womanhood?
9. What are the sources of Browning's insight into womanhood?
10. Compare Pompilia and Dante's Beatrice.
11. Compare Pompilia and Goethe's Margaret.
12. Browning's view of marriage.
13. Browning's interpretation of motherhood.
14. Compare Pompilia with Shakespeare's heroines.

## REFERENCES.

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## SUGGESTIONS TO STUDENTS.

Browning is distinctly a poet to be studied rather than merely read. While much of his poetry can be enjoyed at a single reading, hard work is necessary to give one a full grasp of his message and appreciation of his art. Moreover, his best work has at least one mark that classes it with the masterpieces of world literature—the quality of being inexhaustible, rewarding repeated study with ever deeper truth and beauty.

Thus students should read over and over the poems to be discussed in this course until every line is familiar. Next in value to these texts are Browning's other works, especially those recommended in the references following each lecture outline. Constant comparison should be made between one poem and another with the aim of appreciating the essential characteristics of Browning's art and the great ideas to which he most frequently returns.

Next in value to Browning's own work are those collections of information assumed by Browning in his poems, and hence necessary to the intelligent reading of them. Of these, Berdoo's *Browning Cyclopædia* is perhaps the most useful; Cooke's *Browning Guide-Book* and the notes to the *Camberwell* and new *Riverside* editions are also excellent.

Biographies of Browning (such as, Mrs. Orr's, Dowden's, Herford's, Sharp's, Chesterton's, and the Browning Letters) come next in value. While Browning was opposed to the poet's wearing his heart upon his sleeve and resented the biographer's intrusion into the intimacies of the artist's life, nevertheless Browning's greatest work would have been impossible except for the depths of his personal experience, and his philosophy becomes doubly illuminating when seen in relation to his own character and development.

Criticism, even when appreciative, should be given a distinctly subordinate place and used mainly to stimulate the student's thinking after his own view of Browning's poetry and philosophy has been clearly formulated.

Above all, *thinking* is more important than much reading. All

great art is an illumination and interpretation of human life; thus one's own life is in turn the key to the understanding of the work of art. All the great experiences of human life are in some form in the past of the humblest of us; thus each has within himself the material for the understanding of the deepest poetry. There is plenty of lumber in anyone's attic; what people need, as Emerson put it, is "a lamp to ransack their attics withal." There is plenty of experience in your past life, what you need is the light of thought to interpret it. The lamp is hard to light, and only constant care and effort will keep it burning, but nothing can take its place.

An effort to work out, in advance of the lecture, as many as possible of the topics following the lecture outline will help; and expression of one's thinking in a note book, to oneself, or with a group of fellow-students, will do much to clarify thought. A nebulous idea becomes a clear conception only through expression; thus the effort to formulate thought is the greatest discipline to thinking.

## BOOK LIST.

Books starred are of special value in connection with this course; those double-starred are texts for study and discussion, or are otherwise of first importance.

**Browning**, \*\**Works*, *Camberwell edition*, 12 volumes, with introductions and notes by Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke. T. Y. Crowell & Co., New York, 1898.

This edition is in convenient form and is well annotated.

The new *Riverside edition* in 6 volumes, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston, 1899, contains introductions and notes embodying the excellent material from Cooke's *Browning Guide-Book*. The *Cambridge edition*, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston, 1895, is an admirable edition of all Browning's works in one volume, but the type is necessarily small. The edition in 2 volumes, by Augustine Birrell, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1896, is excellent and the type is a little more easy to read than in the Cambridge edition.

Numerous volumes of selections from Browning are currently published, among the most satisfactory of which are those by Smith, Elder & Co., London, and D. Appleton & Co., New York.

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An admirable, well-balanced study. Perhaps the best general criticism of Browning yet published.

- Buchanan, Robert, *Master Spirits*, pp. 89-109, *The Ring and the Book: Browning's Masterpiece*. Henry S. King & Co., London, 1873.
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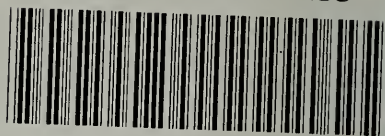
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